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Stage-emendations in the Uttara-Rāma-charita.—By SHRI-PAD KRISHNA BELVALKAR, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

For the last two years or so I have been engaged in preparing for the Harvard Oriental Series an edition of Bhavabhūti's Uttara-Rāma-charita. The work is to be in three volumes. The first volume, which contains a general introduction and an English translation, will be out in three or four months. The second contains—besides the text in Sanskrit and Prākṛit, an index to first lines, and a glossary of Prākṛit words with their Sanskrit equivalents—some five appendices giving among other things the results of the application of certain verse tests to the three extant plays of Bhavabhūti with a view to determine their chronological sequence. The last volume is devoted to notes, variant readings, and critical apparatus, and a few more appendices discussing topics such as 'text-tradition of the play', 'stage-conditions in ancient India', and so forth. The last two volumes are being printed in the Nirṇaya Sagar Press of Bombay, and although more than half the text is already in type, still owing to the distance at which the work has to be carried on, it will be some time next year before these volumes are actually published. The subject matter of the following paper is taken from two appendices in the third volume.

Aufrecht's *Catalogus Catalogorum* lists some eighty five manuscripts of the Uttara-Rāma-charita (text and commentaries), and in the lists of manuscripts published since 1903 I have noted some thirty new manuscripts; so that, even after allowing for repetitions in the lists and for loss of manuscripts, the number of manuscripts that are available for constituting the text of the play is well over a hundred. Of course not all these manuscripts would be ultimately valuable, but it is at least necessary to examine them, if it be merely to discard

them later; and I intended to do so before actually publishing my edition. However this is a task that may easily take years, and since, strangely enough, in spite of the fact that there are some twelve Indian editions of the play, no Occidental edition of it has so far appeared, I was advised to put forth at first a tentative edition of the play, going back to it and preparing a second definitive edition as early as I could. The present edition accordingly is based on only eight manuscripts.

The selection of these particular eight manuscripts was made for various reasons. In the first place, I tried to get together manuscripts from parts of India widely different from each other, such as Madras and Nepal, Poona and Calcutta, Guzerat and Vizagapatam. Secondly, the manuscripts are written in four different characters: Nevārī, Devanāgarī, Grantha, and Telugu, only the first two of which slightly resemble each other in the form of their letters. Lastly, the manuscripts belong to different ages, ranging from the twelfth to the nineteenth century, and at least four of these eight manuscripts have independent value. Hence the results yielded by a careful collation of these manuscripts, although admittedly tentative, may at least be regarded as sufficiently plausible. I shall give a few significant illustrations.

The 27th stanza of the fifth act of the Uttara-Rāma-charita runs as follows:

*Ajitam puṇyam ūrjasvi kakutsthasyeva te mahaḥ
Śreyase śāśvato Devo Varāhaḥ parikalpatām.*

Instead, the commentator Virarāghava and three of the eight manuscripts used for my edition give a prose passage identical with the above stanza in the beginning and end¹. One of these manuscripts is the oldest extant manuscript of the play, being dated Samvat 309 of the Nepal era, which corresponds to the year 1196 of the Christian era. This fact therefore gives us a line of manuscripts genetically descended from an original exemplar of the twelfth century or earlier. Owing to a fracture or a peeling off of the leaf at this particular place, the original exemplar apparently had a lacuna which in a conscientious copy would be indicated by a blank. This later came to be filled in by the insertion of a few words which along with

¹ The identical portions are un-italicized.

the beginning and the end could give some sort of a meaning to the whole passage such as we find it in the printed editions of the play with Vīrarāghava's commentary. Manuscripts which give the original stanza intact I call A manuscripts; those which give the substitute prose passage I call B manuscripts.

In addition to the case above described there are a number of other cases—over seventy-five—where manuscripts of class A give consistently readings different from those of class B; and while some of these variations can conceivably be explained away as scribal errors, there are others where a deliberate change of some sort seems to be in evidence. I shall cite only one instance, which comes from the prologue at the beginning of the play. All A manuscripts read the first half of the second stanza thus:

Yam Brahmāṇam iyaṁ Devī Vāg vaśyevānuvartate,
while the B manuscripts read:

Yam Brahmāṇam iyaṁ Devī Vāg vaśyevānavartata;
where there is a deliberate change of tense—from 'anuvartate', present, to 'anvartata', imperfect. The original reading described Bhavabhūti as one 'on whom the Goddess of Speech attends as a submissive handmaid'; while the other reading—presumably introduced after the poet's death—describes him as one 'on whom the Goddess of Speech attended as a submissive handmaid'.

Other cases of variation were in the same fashion submitted to a careful scrutiny, and as a result I am able to group the changes under the following headings.

1. **Omissions.** I shall mention three of the most significant places where A manuscripts give the passage and B manuscripts omit it. The passages are¹: act vii, stanza 38; act i, stanza 31 and the three speeches immediately preceding; and act iii, the whole passage from stanza 21 to the end of Rāma's speech following stanza 24. This last omission covers four stanzas, and fourteen lines of prose. Now it is of course possible to explain omissions as due to errors of vision or the accidental loss of an intervening leaf. But this explanation does not readily commend itself in a place where the passages omitted happen to be just the passages that we would like

¹ My references are to the Nirṇaya Sagar edition of the play with Vīrarāghava's commentary.

to see omitted, or, at any rate, such as a company of actors wishing to stage the play would inevitably omit as being not necessary to the action of the play. The three cases selected are of this nature.

2. **Alterations** both in the order and the wording of a passage. These occur quite frequently and, in many cases, the two or more available variants are equally good. Some of the changes are of such a radical nature and are often such distinct improvements that one is led to ask whether it is Bhavabhūti himself revising and perfecting the earlier form of the work. Such a procedure would be just in the manner of the poet.

3. **Insertions** and modifications in the stage-directions and other minor changes calculated to assist the actor in interpreting his part correctly, or to produce dramatic vividness. Of the former kind, I have been able to put together some twenty or twenty-five instances where the B manuscripts usually give a stage-direction or a form of address more precise or more exactly corresponding to the character and the occasion. Of the latter kind I will mention just one instance. Act iii, stanza 26, reads as follows (I give the English translation):

‘Thou art my life, my second heart; thou art the moonlight to my eyes, and to my body the immortal ambrosia’: with these and a hundred other words of endearment her simple and loving soul thou didst beguile; and her now—alas! why utter the rest?

At the conclusion of the stanza the speaker, Vāsanti, goes into a swoon. Now if Vāsanti was going to swoon at all, the best opportunity for it was of course the word ‘alas’. Instead she waits to complete the stanza, saying ‘I shall not talk any more’ (but go quietly into a swoon)! In a case like this the acting version would certainly omit the last words of the stanza, ‘why utter the rest?’—and this is just what some manuscripts of class B do.

I shall not inflict any further details upon you, but merely state my conclusion. The Uttara-Rāma-charita has come down to us in two sufficiently distinct text-traditions, and one of these gives us a number of characteristic divergences which are best explained as successive stage-emendations, most of them introduced after Bhavabhūti’s death and in the course

of the later stage-history of the play, although a few of them may well have come from the poet himself. That the Uttara-Rāma-charita had a stage-history I infer from a passage in the Prithvīrāja-vijaya, a poem of the twelfth century which has survived to us in only one incomplete manuscript written on birch-bark, and which I am at present editing for the Bibliotheca Indica series of Calcutta.

Assuming the truth of this result I draw from it two further corollaries. The first I should rather state as a problem. We know that Kālidāsa's Śakuntala has come down to us in two or three or four recensions, and scholars are still disputing as to which of them is genuine. Now would it not be possible, I wonder, after a scientific study of *all* the available manuscript material, to come down to two ultimate recensions of the play, the differences between them being not necessarily greater than those between the first and the second quarto of Hamlet? In that case both would be genuine, one being the acting version of the other, possibly prepared by Kālidāsa himself. I have already found out some evidence in support of such a theory, but the whole problem is so intricate as well as interesting that I hope sometime to study it in a thorough manner and with the help of all the available material.

My second corollary is this: If in this manner we find reason to believe in the existence in ancient India of some sort of regular companies of actors who gave in a particular locality plays written for them by a more or less limited group of dramatists, then, in the very nature of the case, it is to be expected that the form, history, and development of drama would be different for different localities. A court-poet like Kālidāsa, for instance, would write dramas exclusively dealing with the life at court and especially in the harem. Open-air performances given at fairs—such as those of Bhavabhūti—would differ from them not only in the theme selected, but also in the stage-conditions, by which I mean not merely the stage-properties but also the nature of the audience, which would have a deciding influence on the form of the drama. Viewed in this light the ten *rūpakas* of Hindu dramatists, some of which under a more or less disguised form exist in India even to the present day, would acquire quite a new significance. In any case these considerations will at least

teach us caution in making any sweeping generalizations regarding the Indian drama. In India no less than in Greece or Mediaeval Europe the drama as an institution came into existence in answer to a felt demand on the part of the people, and the different forms which it probably assumed in different Provinces were due to differences of environment. Hindu drama was not, as is sometimes thought, a form of literary exercise in a dead language. Sanskrit for that matter is not even now in any real sense of the term a *dead* language. Often it happens to be the only available means of communication between scholars in different parts of India. Even now at times there are revivals of old Sanskrit plays such as the *Śakuntala* or the *Mudrā-Rākshasa*: I have myself seen the former given by a regular professional company. To understand a play rightly we must therefore study the stage-conditions, partly with the help of direct statements as given in Bharata's *Nāṭya-śāstra* and partly in the light of such indirect testimony as the extant dramas afford us. I may announce here in passing that I have at present on hand a critical edition of Bharata's *Nāṭya-śāstra* to be published under the auspices of the Harvard Oriental Series.